Newsletter of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh
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FIELD OUTING: Sunday, 21st January 2018: Narsapur Reserve Forest. Meeting point: Punjagutta (opp. Mangatrai Pearls), 6.00AM.

Always a dependable birding location, the beauty and bird richness of the verdant Narsapur Forest would be much-enhanced in the winter season. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water and breakfast. For further details and to co-ordinate, please contact Ms Surekha Aitabathula (99490-38532).

INDOOR MEETING: Sunday, 18th January 2018: TALK BY DR. (MRS.) V.A. MANGA: PLANTS IN THE LIFE OF BIRDS

Dr. (Mrs.) V.A. Manga, Life Member of BSAP, is a retired Associate Professor, Bhavan's New Science College, Hyderabad. After retirement, she took to her hobby of bird-watching and bird photography as a full-time occupation.

As we know, birds depend on plants for food, shelter and their very survival. Their dependence on grains, nectar and fruits is obvious. Similarly, the tree-hole nesters' requirements of wooded areas is apparent. Sometimes the role of plants in the life of birds may not be so obvious. Many birds have an interesting relationship with plants, and some can survive only in the vicinity of certain plants. The survival of any organism requires a healthy bionetwork. Dr Manga's talk will explore one aspect of that network - birds' dependence on plants.

Trip Report – Narsapur, January 21, 2018

Text and Photos: Shilka Chaudhari

White-breasted Kingfisher

The new year started on a cheerful note with a birding trip to Narsapur Forest. We (my father and I) met the other birders (around 12 of them) at Dundigal Air Force Academy gate for a cup of hot tea on the cold morning before heading to our destination. We planned to cover both the forest and the lake in our trip.

Located 45km north of Hyderabad in the Medak district, the forest spreads between Gummadidala and Narsapur towns. It spans over 30 sq.km. and is blessed with diverse flora and fauna. On our way, I was quite surprised by the barrel of monkeys on the roadside, which seemed to be used to offerings by passersby. As we were driving, we suddenly noticed an Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyceros birostris*) in flight.

On reaching the forest and parking our vehicles, we were greeted by the call of the White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*), as informed by our birding expert Shafaat Ulla *saab*. Heading inside, a few birders spotted the Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) and a Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*).

Brahminy Starling

On our way towards the marshy land, we came across some common species like Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnia pagodarum*), Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*), Oriental Magpie Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) and some Drongos. We spotted a flock of Oriental White-eyes (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) chirping in the reed, and Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) flying around.

On our first stop, the marsh land covered in reeds and grass, we spotted a Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*). It was a pretty sight! The other notable sightings around the water body were the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smirnensis*) and Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*).

Moving further down the path, a distinct call caught the attention of some of the birders. The sighting of the bird in the reeds, which was almost the size of a Babbler, led Shafaat Ulla *saab* to refer his book and identify it as a Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*).

The call of this warbler was quite sharp. On the other side, a few birders were trying to identify the bird on the ground close to a tree as to whether it was a Pipit or a Lark. After taking a few snaps, referring to books and the following lengthy discussion, it was concluded that the little bird was a Singing Bushlark (*Mirafra cantillans*) and not a Paddyfield Pipit as thought earlier.

Again, I was lucky enough to spot the Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) close by. They happen to be one of my favourites.

As we are heading towards the lake, we noticed a flock of Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) on one side, and a lone Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) perched on top of a tree on the other side of the path.

Rosy Starling

Some of the birders had already reached the lake and made a note of lots of water birds, especially three different kinds of ducks – Northern Pintails (*Anas acuta*), Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) and Lesser Whistling-ducks (*Dendrocygna javanica*). The Cotton Pygmy-goose (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) deserves a special mention. Indian Moorhens (*Gallinula chloropus*), Common Snipes (*Gallinago gallinago*), Great Egrets (*Casmerodius albus*) and Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) were also seen around in the lake.

Our final sighting was of a Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) hovering around the water for a good catch. The trip was concluded with a hearty breakfast, and drafting a list of our findings. We had seen close to 38 species. The highlight of the trip was the Clamorous Reed Warbler with the sharp call saying, 'Look at me, I'm here'!

Reconnecting with nature in a pollution-free environment was indeed a good way to start a brand new year. It was a good edition of Sunday Times!

Painted Stork

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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*)

Tufted Duck Male (L) and Female (R) (Pulicat, December 24, 2017)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Aythya*
Species: *A. fuligula*
Size: 40-47 cm

Description & distribution: The Tufted Duck, also known as Tufted Pochard, is a small diving duck that breeds across temperate and northern Eurasia, and is a winter visitor to southern and western Europe, southern Asia – including India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, though rare in Sri Lanka – and even, occasionally, coastal United States and Canada. It is also seen almost around the year in most parts of the United Kingdom. It gets its name due to a visible tuft on the rear of the head. The breeding male is completely glossy black except for white flanks, blue-grey bill, and golden-yellow eyes; non-breeding males are duller, have greyish flanks and a less prominent crest. The adult female is dusky brown with paler brown flanks, and can be confused with the females of other diving ducks, especially the Greater Scaup, due to the similar, though less extensive, white patches around the base of the bill occasionally seen in the Tufted Duck. However, the iris is yellow in the Tufted Duck, unlike the dark iris in the Baer's and Common Pochards and the Ferruginous Ducks, with whom it can be confused. In flight, both sexes show a broad white band on the trailing edge of the wings is visible.

Habitat & behaviour: The Tufted Duck is a fairly gregarious species, and is usually found in mixed flocks along with other diving ducks like Common Pochards, in open waters like coastal lagoons, sheltered ponds, estuaries and tidal bays. Breeding habitat is close to marshes or other waterbodies that have plenty of vegetation that allows the Tufted Duck to build well-concealed nests. Its diet consists mainly of molluscs, crustaceans, aquatic insects, seeds, roots and some aquatic plants and weeds. It can remain under water for considerable periods of time. Feeding is usually by diving in deep water, though it may occasionally upend for food. Like many other ducks, it may feed at night. Females utter a harsh *karr*, usually in flight, whereas the males are usually silent, although they give out a soft whistling *wit-oo* during courtship.

Nesting: The Tufted Duck generally breeds between May to early August. The usual clutch consists of 9-10 greenish eggs, laid on the sides of lakes or other small water bodies, in small nests built of available leaves, grasses, reeds and feathers and concealed deep in vegetation.

Local name: The Tufted Duck is known as *'Dubaru', 'Ablak'* or *'Rahwara'* in Hindi, *'Nalla chiluwa'* in Telugu and *'Kurungalian'* in Tamil.

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